Contact name and details	The Revd Dr Mark Rowland Secretary of the Faith and Order Committee rowlandm@methodistchurch.org.uk
Resolution	12/1. The Conference receives the Report. 12/2. The Conference adopts the criteria in section 5 above. 12/3. The Conference directs that the criteria in section 5 above be published in Book VI of the Constitutional Practice and Discipline of the Methodist Church.

Summary of content and impact

Subject and aims	A review of the criteria by which it is determined whether the Methodist Church can recognise ordinations which have taken place in other churches and conferences.
Main points	For the recognition of an ordination an appropriate degree of communion is required between the Methodist Church and the other church or conference, and the ordination service must contain the necessary elements. This framework is retained from the existing criteria. Amendments and guidance have been proposed to incorporate diaconal ordination and to address questions as to the burden of proof.
Background context and relevant documents (with function)	Criteria for the Transfer of Ministers (1992) Faith and Order Committee report (2024)
Impact	Simplifies the work required to determine whether an applicant's ordination can be recognised.

Criteria for the recognition of ordination

1 *Introduction*

1.1 The Conference of 2024 directed the Faith and Order Committee to review the 'Criteria for the Transfer of Ministers' (1993) and to report to the Conference of

2026. This work concerns the circumstances under which the Methodist Church recognises an ordination carried out in another church or conference. Recognition of an ordination is an essential first step if a minister of another church or conference wishes to be considered for service in the Methodist Church in Britain. There is a wider process which considers questions of the appropriateness, in all the circumstances, of such a transfer. The proposals of this report are concerned only with the (narrow) question of whether the ordination itself can be recognised: in other words, it is about eligibility not suitability.[1]

1.2 A wider review of the processes by which ministers come from other churches and conferences to serve in the Methodist Church in Britain is being undertaken by the Ministries Committee. Appropriate liaison has been maintained between the two pieces of work. Recognition of the ordination is a necessary but not a sufficient condition for any transfer to take place.

1.3 The current criteria were formed in 1993 and pose two broad questions to be considered in establishing whether the Methodist Church can recognise an ordination to have taken place:

1. Whether a sufficient degree of communion exists between the Methodist Church and the church in which the minister was ordained; and
2. Whether the service that took place conformed sufficiently to the Methodist Church's understanding of an ordination service.

Both questions need to be answered in the affirmative in order to conclude that the ordination can be recognised.

1.4 Since the criteria were produced, the range of churches from which applications are received has significantly increased. It can sometimes be quite difficult to find sufficient evidence on which to base conclusions on the two questions. The criteria as currently set out do not give any consideration as to the level of evidence required or in which way any doubtful points should be resolved.

1.5 The 1993 criteria are only concerned with the recognition of ordinations to the ministry of the word and sacraments (ie presbyteral ministry). As the Methodist Church recognises that it has received two orders of ministry, the presbyteral and the diaconal, it is important that the criteria should be updated to include diaconal ministry.

---

1 Particular questions of suitability arise in the case of former ministers of other churches and conferences. Attention is drawn to the provisions of Standing Order 731.

2 *The Existing Criteria*

2.1 The existing criteria set out a number of marks of a relationship of communion between churches in the context of the transfer of ministers between them. They say, "to be in communion with the Methodist Church for this purpose it is to be expected that a church

(a) claims to be an expression of the one holy catholic and apostolic Church of Jesus Christ;
(b) recognises other Christian communities outside its own fellowship, including the Methodist Church, as belonging to the Body of Christ;
(c) accepts the Trinitarian faith as set forth in the Apostles' and Nicene Creeds, whether or not it makes formal use of the creeds in public worship or official statements;
(d) acknowledges the authority of the holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments as containing all things necessary for salvation; and
(e) recognises and practices the two biblical sacraments of baptism and Lord's Supper;
(f) possesses a (presbyteral) ministry of word and sacraments to which candidates are ordained for life;
(g) does not by its officially authorised teaching and practice repudiate the standards of personal and social ethics which, in Methodist understanding, the Church of Jesus Christ is called to uphold;
(h) is willing to receive a Methodist minister by transfer, without further ordination."[2]

2.2 These criteria are set out in the first place to govern to which churches the Conference can allow ministers to transfer. It is stated "We judge that these conditions are essential if there is to be a genuine transfer of a minister to a church in which the ministry to which he or she has been ordained can continue to be exercised. Where such conditions do not exist, we would expect a Methodist minister to resign rather than apply for transfer."[3] In the case of receiving ministers, the question is put differently: "On the other hand, for an ordination to be recognised by the Methodist Church as ordination in the Church of God, it must be an act of a body with which there is some measure of communion, even if impaired. That body must be acknowledged to be a Christian church".[4] Thus for a minister to be received from another church, it must be possible to

2 Criteria for the Transfer of Ministers, 8
3 Criteria for the Transfer of Ministers, 8
4 Criteria for the Transfer of Ministers, 11

acknowledge an appropriate measure of communion, by satisfying at least some of these marks. One consequence of a requirement for only 'some measure of communion' is that it is possible for the Methodist Church to recognise ordinations in churches which do not recognise our ordinations, for example the Church of England or the Roman Catholic Church.

2.3 As to the ordination service, the criteria require the following:

(a) there must be an intention, however expressed, to ordain to the ministry of word and sacraments in the church of God;
(b) it must carry an expectation of life-long commitment;
(c) it must therefore, according to the discipline of the church concerned, be unrepeatable;
(d) it must be an act, normally the laying-on of hands, which is accompanied by prayer in the setting of an act of worship;
(e) it must be an act which carries the full authority of the church, however that is expressed in terms of the ecclesiology of the church concerned;
(f) it must be an act which is recognised and transferable within the churches of the denomination as a whole, and not be confined in its effect to a single congregation.[5]

2.4 The Faith and Order Committee of 1993 wisely noted "it is impossible to anticipate all the questions of interpretation which may arise as applications may present themselves in the future from a wide variety of Christian traditions in Britain and elsewhere." That has certainly proved to be the case and in the light of experience, the Committee offers some proposed amendments while suggesting that the overall structure and approach continues to serve us well.

3 *The recognition of diaconal ordinations*

3.1 The Faith and Order Committee has no hesitation in recommending that amendments should be made to the criteria in order to provide for the recognition of diaconal ordinations. Elements (b) to (f) listed under 2.3 above will clearly apply as well for diaconal ordinations as for presbyteral ones and consequently no amendment is proposed to those elements.

3.2 The Committee has given long consideration to how the necessary intention in the case of the ordination of deacons should be expressed. Within the various Methodist Churches, and even more so across the breadth of other churches,

5 Criteria for the Transfer of Ministers, 13

there is a wide variety of ministries that might be seen as in some sense diaconal. There is a wide variety of understandings of these ministries and a wide variety of services by which people might be appointed to them. The rite may be referred to as ordination, consecration, commissioning, induction or in some other way. In the Methodist Church in Britain, deacons belong to both an order of ministry and a religious order; in other churches they may be one or other or indeed neither.

3.3 While the language of the ministry of the word and sacraments is widely used as being a clear indicator of presbyteral ministry, ways of describing diaconal ministry vary and are harder to distinguish from other ministries, for example the various lay ministries. At the same time, there are other ministries which are not named as diaconal that may nevertheless seem to us to embody something of our understanding of diaconal ministry.

3.4 The Methodist Church in Britain believes that ordained diaconal ministry is a particular calling and those it ordains as deacons are those it has judged to be called to that ministry. In other churches, ordination to the diaconate may often be intended to be followed fairly soon after by ordination to the presbyterate. This is a contrast to our own understanding of the diaconate and it will be an appropriate question to explore as part of any discernment as to such a person serving as a deacon in the Methodist Church in Britain. However, the Committee does not believe this prevents the recognition of the ordination as such. As many such churches (eg the Roman Catholic Church) also have deacons who are not subsequently ordained as presbyters, to take the contrary view would be to recognise some of such a church's ordinations to the diaconate but not others, even though the rites may be identical. This would be a problematic result as it would make the recognition of the ordination dependent on events which have not yet taken place.

3.5 Where a candidate has first been ordained as a deacon and a subsequent ordination to the presbyterate has taken place, candidates should normally only be considered for transfer to the Methodist Church's presbyteral ministry. If such a candidate did seek to transfer to serve as a deacon in the Methodist Church in Britain, the panel considering the application would need to explore the questions of call very thoroughly (and with the kind of process undertaken when a Methodist presbyter seeks to transfer to the diaconate in mind). A candidate who had been ordained deacon and wished to seek ordination as a presbyter should usually follow the process for this in their home tradition and then seek transfer as a presbyter. Where this is not possible, such a candidate could be received into Full Connexion with the British Conference as a deacon and then follow the process of Standing Order 718 to apply for transfer to the presbyterate.

3.6 In *The Theology and Ecclesiology Underpinning the Diaconate and the Methodist Diaconal Order*, the Conference affirmed 'that preaching is part of a deacon's ministry of witness and service as they proclaim the gospel out of their rootedness in Christ's ministry of self-giving love.'[6] Deacons serving in our Connexion are therefore expected to share in the ministry of the word in appropriate ways. The Conference also affirmed that it is not part of the ministry of a deacon in the Methodist Church in Britain to preside at Holy Communion. The Committee is aware that in other churches and conferences different approaches to these questions are taken. However, it is the Committee's view that these variations are not relevant to the question of the recognition of the ordination itself but should be thoroughly explored as part of the discernment as to whether a particular deacon is called to serve in the British Connexion.

3.7 Considering all the complexities involved, while also seeking to keep the criteria as simple and as clear as possible, the Committee recommends that, in addition to criteria (b) to (f) above, for an ordination to the diaconate to be recognised by the Methodist Church, there must be an explicit intention to ordain the person as a deacon in the One Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church, which includes the use of the language of 'deacon' and describing the service as an 'ordination' or using the word 'ordain'. 'Deaconess' can be regarded as equivalent to deacon for this purpose, provided that it signifies a female deacon and does not indicate any difference of office, function or status. The variation in practice in different churches and conferences means that it is proposed to seek clarity through clear language. This is different from the case with presbyters, where a common core of the ministry of the word and sacraments is described in different churches and conferences with a variety of language, while being recognisable as the same ministry. The alternative to (a) above in the case of deacons would then be:

> (a) there must be an intention, explicitly and clearly expressed, to ordain the person as a deacon in the One Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church.

3.8 The language 'One Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church' is drawn from the Nicene Creed and follows the declaration of intention in the ordination services in *The Methodist Worship Book*.[7] It is therefore proposed the point (a) for presbyters should be amended to be consistent with what is proposed in 3.7 for deacons.

---

6 The Theology and Ecclesiology Underpinning the Diaconate and the Methodist Diaconal Order, 2.3.2
7 *The Methodist Worship Book*, p. 298

4 *Evidence and the burden of proof*

4.1 One of the challenges in assessing whether ordinations can be recognised is that the current criteria provide no guidance as to the evidence required nor how clearly each point must be satisfied. Some churches, like the Methodist Church, have a written ordination liturgy that is followed in every ordination service. However, others have more variable or informal traditions and even if a copy of the order of service is available, it may lack sufficient detail.

4.2 As a matter of principle, because of the significance of ordination, the Committee recommends that the criteria should be clearly satisfied so that those judging the application can feel the matter is beyond doubt. While those judging the application may seek additional evidence where that will be helpful (eg by consulting a church's published materials relating to ordination or by requesting more information from the applicant or their church authorities), it is the applicant's responsibility to provide the evidence that demonstrates that their ordination can be recognised by the Methodist Church.

5. *New Criteria*

5.1 The Committee recommends that new criteria as follows be adopted:

CRITERIA FOR THE RECOGNITION OF ORDINATION

The following criteria govern the recognition of ordinations by the Methodist Church. Where Standing Orders use phrases such as 'a church whose ministry is recognised by the Methodist Church' they should be interpreted in accordance with these criteria. These criteria should be clearly satisfied so that those judging an application can feel the matter is beyond doubt. While those judging the application may seek additional evidence where that will be helpful (e.g. by consulting a church's published materials relating to ordination or by requesting more information from the applicant or their church authorities), it is the applicant's responsibility to provide the evidence that demonstrates that their ordination can be recognised by the Methodist Church.

A. The Church from which the applicant comes

For an ordination to be recognised by the Methodist Church, it must have been performed by a body that can be acknowledged as a Christian Church and with which the Methodist Church can share a measure of communion

even if impaired. To be in communion with the Methodist Church for this purpose, it is expected that a church

(a) claims to be an expression of the One Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church of Jesus Christ;
(b) recognises other Christian communities outside its own fellowship, including the Methodist Church, as belonging to the Body of Christ;
(c) accepts the Trinitarian faith as set forth in the Apostles' and Nicene Creeds, whether or not it makes formal use of the creeds in public worship or official statements;
(d) acknowledges the authority of the holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments as containing all things necessary for salvation;
(e) recognises and practices the two biblical sacraments of baptism and the Lord's Supper;
(f) possesses a (presbyteral) ministry of the word and sacraments to which candidates are ordained for life;
(g) does not by its officially authorised teaching and practice repudiate the standards of personal and social ethics which, in Methodist understanding, the Church of Jesus Christ is called to uphold; and
(h) is willing to receive a Methodist minister by transfer, without further ordination.

An appropriate measure of communion, for these purposes, would be demonstrated by satisfying a substantial majority of these requirements, having regard to all the circumstances and to the varying significance of the requirements (e.g. not being able to receive a Methodist minister without further ordination is a less significant impediment to communion than rejection of the Trinitarian faith).

B. The Ordination Service

For an ordination to be recognised by the Methodist Church, the service must have conformed to the following:

(a) for presbyters: there must be an intention, however expressed, to ordain to the ministry of the word and sacraments in the One Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church;
for deacons: there must be an intention, explicitly and clearly expressed, to ordain the person as a deacon in the One Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church.
(b) it must carry an expectation of life-long commitment;

(c) it must therefore, according to the discipline of the church concerned, be unrepeatable;
(d) it must be an act, normally the laying-on of hands, which is accompanied by prayer in the setting of an act of worship;
(e) it must be an act which carries the full authority of the church, however that is expressed in terms of the ecclesiology of the church concerned;
(f) it must be an act which is recognised and transferable within the churches of the denomination as a whole, and not be confined in its effect to a single congregation.

*****RESOLUTIONS**

12/1. The Conference receives the Report.

12/2. The Conference adopts the criteria in section 5 above.

12/3. The Conference directs that the criteria in section 5 above be published in Book VI of the Constitutional Practice and Discipline of the Methodist Church.